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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the kinds of involvement with schools parents want and what keeps parents from being involved. An extended introduction discusses the nature of parent involvement programs, barriers to their implementation, and the role of parents and teachers in the programs. A survey concerning parent involvement was given to parents of 305 children in kindergarten through third grade at a rural Virginia school. Results from 180 respondents indicated that parents wanted more communication from teachers and a greater knowledge of their children's progress in school. The survey also identified several variables that kept parents from being involved in the school. Based on these results, teachers in a kindergarten and a third grade class began to send notes concerning their children's activities to parents. After two weeks, the parents were surveyed. Parents indicated that they wanted the program to continue and that they felt more informed about their children's progress. A reference list of 39 items and a bibliography of 60 items are included. Appendixes include samples of the first survey sent to parents, the form used for notes to parents, and the final survey. (BC)

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Recommendations for Increasing Parent Involvement at Ryan Primary in Nelson County, Virginia

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Abstract

Rural schools face unique difficulties in implementing successful parent involvement programs. In order for these programs to be successful, the school must consider the needs and wants of the parents and what keeps them from being involved. The subjects in this study were the parents of 305 elementary students who ranged from kindergarten to third grade. They attended a rural school in central Virginia. These subjects were issued a survey designed by Kay Brimijoin and Dr. Eleonor Ross of Amherst County, Virginia and 180 were returned. Parents were found to want more communication and knowledge of student progress. A number of variables that kept them from being involved were identified. An activity was initiated in two classrooms to attempt to increase parent knowledge of student progress. The results and parent feedback of the activity were analyzed.

Statement of the Problem

Parent involvement is a crucial element of a child's education. When parents are involved in education, their child's academic achievement improves and his attendance is more regular. In addition, a good parent involvement program fosters community support. Since parents set the stage for learning through their attitudes about the school, it is important that the school maintain a healthy relationship with them. This requires clear, open communication and a strong parent involvement program.

There are many obstacles to overcome in creating an effective parent involvement program. The school must consider the unique backgrounds and needs of their parents. They must examine the factors that prevent the parents from being involved in their school and determine what the parents want from the school. In addition, effective parent involvement requires the commitment and motivation of parents, teachers and the administration.

Setting

In a rural community the problems of creating a strong parent involvement program increase. Ryan Primary in Nelson County, Virginia is typical of a rural school with unique needs in the area of parent involvement. Ryan Primary is situated near the Blue Ridge Mountains in central Virginia. Students attend Ryan from a large geographical area. It takes some students more than an hour by bus to get to school in the morning. The majority of students come from the lower middle class. The low economic development has influenced the county; and it, therefore, has a low tax base. The typical industries are farming, logging and apple orchards. The educational attainment of the majority of the parents is a high school diploma. It is not uncommon, though, for parents to have either attended college or to have dropped out of high school.

Hypothesis Statement

Ryan faces a difficult challenge in implementing a strong parent involvement program because of the variety of backgrounds that the parents come from and the large geographic region that it serves. In creating an effective parent involvement program, teachers and administration must consider the unique needs and desires of the parents. They must be aware of the time constraints due to work and home location that influence the ability of a parent to be involved. In addition, they must attempt to be aware of what the parent wants from the school. To do this they must evaluate the parents needs and their attitudes toward the school: this study will analyze what parents say they want and what keeps them from being involved. This study will also analyze the effects of an activity that was designed to meet what the parents said they wanted. If these factors are considered in planning parent involvement programs, parent involvement in the school will increase and parents will have a more positive attitude toward the school and it's employees.

Literary Review

The first question that must be answered is why is parent involvement important? Chavkin and Williams (1984, p. 4) stated, "it has become increasingly clear that educators by themselves cannot accomplish the reforms necessary to improve school and education." Research has also found that home environment contibutes more strongly to predict a child abilities than social status or family structure (Durcharme & Fleming, 1985). Therefore, a home that is involved in the school had a positive effect on school abilities. Ducharme and Fleming (p. 91) found that the, "degree and quality of parent-child interactions around a common activity...(are) critical determinants of the affective growth of children." Overall, it is safe to assume that most parent involvement programs are based on the premise that parents are important to a child's success (Williams & Chavkin, 1985). It is evident that parent involvement affects many areas of a child's life. Later a more indepth review of the

literature will examine specific effects of parent involvement.

Definition of Parent Involvement

Any discussion about how parents should be involved in school must also be proceeded by a definition of parent involvement. Morrison (1988) described parent involvement as a "partnership between parents and teachers and their helpers in the community,...(it is) a developmental process that is built over a period of time. through intentions, planning and effort of every team member (p.418)." Much literature stressed the ideal that involvement should be developmental. In fact, Chavkin and Williams (1984) hold that it is commonly believed that parents should be partners in the education process and that parent involvement is developmental.

The Goal of Programs

There also appear to be common goals of parent involvement programs. Many stress the need to make parent involvement an individual process

by designing parent programs around the needs of specific parents (Turnbull and Turnbull, 1986; Seefeldt, 1985; Morrison, 1978) Morrison (1978) described this belief stating, "a good program should involve all parents, at whatever level they are willing and able to become involved (p. 171)."

In addition, most programs of parent involvement are designed around the belief that they should be long lasting and well planned (Honig, 1989). Richardson (1988) recommended that consistent communication is necessary which involves a continuous and consistant program. Other programs are based on the belief that there is a hierarchy of home and school relations. Initial programs should start small and gradually build parent involvement to the point of giving parents a part in school decision making or empowering parents. Rasinski and Fredericks (1989) labeled the levels of programs as (1) those that monitor, (2) those that inform, (3) those that encourage parent participation, (4) and finally those that empower parents. Their defined levels were an excellant example of the common

definition of parent involvement as being developmental.

Berclay (1977) further summarized the goals of parent involvement programs. He saw the overall aim of programs to be the broadening of student learning opportunities by increasing personal attention and support. To do this he stated that programs must be designed to meet the needs of individual students by giving them personal attention. They must institute a cooperative partnership between parents and teachers to benefit the students. They must enlist and strengthen parent cooperation within the school. In addition, programs should encourage an environment of two way communication between home and the school. Overall, the program that Berclay recommends would allow the school to obtain services and skills from parents which would leave the teacher with time to concentrate on the professional aspects of teaching.

Types of Programs

The various goals of programs lead to a variety of types of parent involvement programs. Howley (1988) described four types. One type involves the community being involved in the school. Another are those programs where parent involvement is centered at home. There are also programs which center involvement around meeting the basic needs of children. While others involve parents in making decisions about how the school will operate. Honig (1989) divided the types of programs slightly differently. There are those which are school based, where the parent helps the school, those that are considered home based, where the parent helps the child and those that are community based, where the school, family and community help each other. In addition, holding with the developmental definition, Chavkin and Williams (1984) recommended that parent involvement be developed in a sequence. First parents should cooperate with school staff, then school staff should provide services to parents and finally parents and the school should work together as partners.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

Although it is apparent that parent involvement in the schools is important, there are many barriers to creating successful programs. Rasinski and Fredericks (1989, p. 180) wrote that, "one of the first obstacles facing parent involvement initiatives is the myraid of approaches for connecting with parents." They recommended that a school system consider the background and expectations of parents and teachers when designing a program. Hoover and Kathleen (1987) found that factors against parent involvement were a lack of time, minimal opportunities for involvement and indifferent or even antagonistic attitudes of school personel. They found that teachers may fear parents, blame them for their childrens problems and view them as having low levels of commitment and skills. Still other studies attributed lack of parent involvement to a general lack of interest (Karnes, Linnemeyer, and Schwedel, 1981).

Although many barriers to successful programs have been cited, problems in communication have been reported in many studies. Chavkin and Williams (1984), as a result of a six year study, found that when parents were asked why they were not involved in the school 76% stated that they were not asked by teachers to be involved and 70% felt that there were not enough parent and teacher conferences. Joyce (1987) found that barriers to effective programs include logistical problems, communication problems, lack of understanding of the school system and feelings of inferiority. She defined communication problems as including languauge and cultural differences. Joyce pointed out that these problems were compounded if teachers in rural settings failed to become familiar with local culture. Turnbull and Turnbull (1986, p. 8) reporting similar barriers stated that, "lack of information, coupled with other communication problems may contribute to parents' feelings of inferiority."

Other influences that affect parent have also been studied and must be considered when designing

a program. Epstein (1985) found three factors that influence parent involvement: the grade level of the students, the teachers commitment of time and energy, and whether the parent is active in the school or with teacher guided activities at home. In 1983 Johns Hopkins University published a report that influences of parent involvement were grade level, teacher beliefs, and the education of the parents.

How to Set Up Effective Programs

Many researchers have made recommendations about how to set up a good parent involvement program. Recommendations have ranged from having the school first review its' own needs to having written goals of parent involvement for the principal, teachers and parents (Berclay, 1977; Chavkin & Williams, 1984). Researchers have felt that teachers need to be sensitive to the family, focus on supporting the family and know the structure of the family and who wants to be involved. In addition, they should enhance parent self esteem, make time commitments clear and

provide a variety of oppportunities for parent involvement (Seefeldt, 1985; Chavkin, 1984; Berclay, 1977). Chavkin (1984) found that as a result of asking parents how they felt parent involvement could be improved; 93% wanted more information about their child's success in school, 92% felt that parents should be made to feel more welcome in the school, 90% wanted a better understanding of the subjects taught, 89% wanted information about how they could be involved and 89% wanted more activities that included parents, teachers and students.

Specific Effects of Parent Involvement

There is an abundance of research about how parent involvement can benefit the school and community, the parents, the students, and the teachers. It makes clear how effective parent involvement programs are important to a variety of people.

The School and Community

Many of the benefits of parent involvement programs center around their effect on the school. Horn and Davis (1984, p. 133) stated "parent involvement has been cited as one means by which our nation's public schools may be pulled from the brink of disaster." Research has found that parent involvement increases the effectiveness of the school (Goodall, 1985; Gable, 1986; Chavkin & Williams, 1984). In addition, programs also benefit the community. Phelps (1987) found that parent involvement helps to gain community support for the school and Henderson (1987) found that a well planned, long and comprehensive program helps schools be more effective in serving their community.

The Parents

Other research has centered on the uniqueness of the parent/child relationship contributing to the success of parent involvement. Parents are found to be a crucial part in their child's education. Parents are central contibuters to their child's education because they set the stage

for learning with the attitudes that they hold about the value of learning and the quality of the learning environment that they set up at home. In addition, parents can help teachers through their indepth knowledge about their children. Parents are a child's constant companion while teachers change almost yearly. Parents are able to offer the teacher insights about how educational experiences affect the child at home (RMC Research Corp., 1990). Cartwright (1981) found similar results stating that, "the very nature of the parent/child relationship provides a basis for involvement. Parents know their child best and are in a position to spend more time working with their child in a one-to-one situation(p. 7)."

Becher (1984) summarized other research and determined some perspectives about parents on which successful parent involvement programs were based. One must realize that parents already make important contributions but that they can make additional contributions. It is important to realize that parents can learn new parenting techniques and that parents have important

perspectives. Parent and child relationships are different from teacher and child relationships. One must also realize that parent perspectives about involvement are important, most parents really care about their children and that parents have many reasons for involvement.

There has been a variety of research about parent attitides toward being involved. Johns Hopkins University (1984) surveyed parents and found that "almost all parents support the idea of being involved in their children's learning at home (p. 9)." Studies have also shown that parents help their children at home with or without teacher directions but that they would help more if teachers gave them advice (John Hopkins University, 1984; Epstein, 1986; Durcharme & Fleming, 1985) This was evident in a study by Goodall (1985) who found that parents were enthusiastic when they were showed how they could help their child with homework and were found to be committed to helping their child. In addition, Joyce (1987) found that they were all interested in maintaining contact with their child's teacher

through informal procedures, such as telephone calls and notes. Overall, it seems safe to assume that research supports the assumption that parents want to be involved.

There is also research about the effects of parent involvement on parent attitudes toward the school. Epstein (1985) found that involved parents realize how hard teachers work, understand what is being taught and rate the teacher as a better teacher. Becher (1984) reported that parent involvement programs led to parents developing a positive attitude about school personnel and that these programs also increased the parent's self confidence. In addition, parent involvement programs lead to parents increasing their belief in the value of education (Morrison, 1978) and make a difference in parent perceptions about the quality of education (Richardson, 1988).

The Child

Parent involvement has also been shown to have tremendous benefits for children. Hoover & Kathleen (1987) found that parent involvement

increased student achievment, improved student behavior, lowered student absenteeism, created positive student attitudes about school and improved homework habits. Phelps (1987), also, found that involved parents increased academic achievement and made student attendance more regular. Herman and Yeh (1980) found that there is a positive connection between student achievements and parent satisfaction with the school. More specifically, Barth (1979) found that teacher and parent collaboration to reinforce positive school behavior improved student academic performance. In addition, Henderson (1987) found that creating a positive learning environment at home, encouraging positive attitudes and creating high expectations had a powerful impact on student achievement.

Other more detailed studies have found that parent involvement has a tremendous effect on low income and at risk students. Honig (1989) found that children from low income and minority families have the most to gain. For instance, children that were classified as high need and

recieved teacher designed home stimulation from parents achieved higher on standardized tests than others. Armor (1976) found that a more vigorous school effort to involve black parents improved student achievement and higher levels of communication led to better student scores. Other studies have shown that disadvantaged students have displayed better reasoning, language skills, test scores and behavior when their parents were involved in school (Becher, 1984; Irvine, 1979). Finally, Benson, Bucky and Elliot found that children with parents who spent time on educational activities were more involved in school activities, and achieved more regardless of their socioeconomic status, though, different activities were shown to have different effects on low income families.

Studies also show that various types of parent involvement influence a variety of aspects of student behavior. Jencks found that schools with active PTA's had the highest student acievement. Brofenbrenner (1974) found that preschool students showed higher and longer

lasting gains if their mother was actively involved in learning. In addition, early childhood programs that train mothers in using learning materials at home produced significant advances on reading and math tests from school entrance to third grade (Gulnagh & Gordan). Finally, Gillum (1977) found that districts with the most comprehensive parent programs scored the greatest gains in reading scores.

The Teachers

Parent involvement has also been found to have significant effects on teachers. Hoover and Kathleen (1987) found that higher teacher efficacy, the belief of teachers that they can teach and their students can learn, was associated with more parent involvement. Morrison (1978) reported that parent involvement made teachers more efficient and effective because it relieved them of routine tasks and allowed them to work with small groups. In addition, it made teachers more empathetic toward families. Rasinski and Fredericks (1989) also found that parent

involvement programs increased teacher involvement with the family and increased parent involvement in the school and community. Additional benefits of parent involvement have included making a teacher's classroom management more effective, increasing a teacher's supervision and making the classroom more safe and orderly (Epstein, 1985). Epstein also found that involvement by parents improved student attitudes about school and created positive feelings between the teacher and home.

Although much research has been done about the benefits of involving parents in the school other research shows that it is not done by all teachers and if it is done it does not include all parents. Epstein (1986) surveyed a group of Maryland parents and found that 58% had never been asked to be involved in the school. She found that teachers who she classified as leaders included all parents in their parent involvement programs but teachers who were not leaders felt that parents with little education would not help their children. She also found that, although

most parents had positive attitudes about the school, a large number were excluded from even the most basic traditional communication, such as phone calls, memos and conferences. In reality, Epstein's research found that parent education did not effect parent involvement unless teacher attitudes were considered. A few years earlier, when Johns Hopkins University (1983) interviewed Maryland teachers, they found that the most often used technique of parent involvement was teaching the parent how to help the child at home. They also found that most parent involvement techniques were only used with some parents, specific influences included grade level, teacher beliefs and the education of the parents.

Research has found a number of reasons for the differences in teacher paractices of parent involvement. Morrison (1978) found that factors that had a strong effect on teacher practice included: grade level, student racial composition, parent activities at school, teacher graduate training and school district policies. He also found that parent educational level influenced

teacher attitudes about parent involvement but was not a strong determinent of actual teacher practices. Teachers of young students used more and different parent involvement techniques. Student characteristics also affected teacher attitudes and the more discipline problems that they had in their class the more the teacher saw parent involvement as less positive. Finally, Morrison found that teacher experience did not increase parent involvement but that more teacher education did. In other words, regardless of the number of years experience that a teacher had, whether or not she had a graduate level degree significantly affected her attitudes toward parent involvement.

Major Goal

This project was designed to analyze the needs of parents in a rural setting. It's goal was to determine what factors keep parents from being involved in the school. It also looked at what parents wanted and expected from the school.

Schools in rural settings face unique barriers to parent involvement. This study highlighted such hindrances. After parent needs' are determined recommendations to teachers in this type of setting will be made. These recommendations will consider the desires and unique qualities of the parents.

Steps to Reach Goal

Initially I planned to develop a survey to issue to a random sampling of parents. Therefore, I looked at past surveys about parent involvement and adapted some of their questions into one that I designed for Ryan Primary. On visiting Ryan, however, it came to my knowledge that they had issued a similar survey through a tri-county grant and were in the process of recieving these surveys back. Therefore, I obtained permission to use the data from these surveys in my project. This eliminated the need to issue another survey with the possibility that fewer parents would be willing to complete a replication of the earlier survey. I analized this data both quantitatively

and through qualitative coding. I then chose one area that seemed to be a concern, that of more information about student progress, and initiated, through the teachers, an activity in two classrooms in the hope of making parents feel more aware of their child's progress. Another survey was dispensed to these parents to determine if the activity met it's goal. This data was then analyzed. Throughout this period I continued my literary research for information about other studies concerning the need for parent involvement and how to increase it. Finally, based on my interpretation of the data, I compiled some recommendations for Ryan Primary of things to keep in mind and activities to use when working with parents in their school.

Method

Subjects

The parents of all the students of Ryan Primary participated. Ryan Primary has an enrollment of 305 students.

Apparatus

The parents recieved the "Community Survey" (see Appendix A) concerning parent involvement and the school. The survey used was designed by Kay Brimijoin and Dr. Eleonor Ross of Amherst County. It was designed to be used in conjunction with a tri-county grant to investigate parent involvement. 180 completed survey's were returned.

Procedure

First permission to use data from the survey's was recieved from the Principal of Ryan Elementary and the Elementary Supervisor of Nelson County Schools.

Next the data was analyzed. Questions 1 through 8 of the survey were analyzed by quantitative analysis. To obtain this data a sampling of the returned surveys were used. The surveys were in a random order and every fifth one was set aside to be used in analyzing this data. 36 surveys were analyzed.

The explanatory answers to questions 12 through 14 were analyzed through qualitative data analysis, using verbal codes. All the surveys were used to obtain this data.

Results

Equal portions of parents felt that the school personnel communicated with them monthly and once a year or less (see Table 1). Although half of the parents surveyed were contacted by school personnel a number of times a year and half were contacted two times or less, the majority of parents felt well informed about student progress (see Table 2). A newsletter or a note on the report card were the most often used types of commmunication. A home visit was a very rare means of communication (see Table 3). In addition, most parents felt welcome by the school, it's teachers and the principal (see Table 4). The majority of parents, however, only visited the school a few times a year (see Table 5). Finally, the majority of parents were only occasionally or never invited to serve on a school committee (see Table 6).

Table 1

Response Rate That Teachers, Guidance Counselor, and Principal Communicate by Phone or Mail

Response	Percentage
Parents (n=34)	
Once a month or more	35
4 or 5 times a year	15
twice a year	15
once a year or less	35

Table 2

Response Rate of How Well School Informs About Student Progress

Response	Percentage
Parents (n=36)	
Very well	33
Fairly well	47
About average	17
Not at all well	3

Table 3

Response Rate of How the School Communicates

Form	Percentage		
	Most often	Second	Third
Parents	(n=34)	(n=32)	(n=26)
Newsletter	71	25	4
Call	0	9	46
Personal visit	0	6	19
Home visit	0	0	4
Note on report card	29	59	27

Table 4

Response Rate That Parents Feel Welcome by Different Aspects of School

Response	Percentage		
	School	Teacher	Principal
Parents	(n=35)	(n=36)	(n=37)
Strongly agree	71	86	78
Mildly agree	29	14	22
Mildly disagree	0	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0	0

Table 5

Response Rate of Parent Attendance at School

Response	Percentage
Parents (n=36)	
About once a week	0
About once a month	22
A few times	69
Not at all	8

Table 6

Response Rate of Number of Requests to Serve on School Committee

Response	Percentage
Parents (n=36)	
Too many times	0
Many times	6
A few times	50
Not at all	44

In response to question 12, which concerned changes that could be made for better communication, 48% of the parent' answers concerned the need for more information about their child. 42% of the answers expressed a concern for more information about student progress. 80% wanted more parent/teacher communication.

A need for more money to the school was involved in 56% of the reponses to question 13 about how to improve the school. 37% of the reponses indicated a need for more and better school equipment. 32% requested that different topics be taught and that others were taught with more concentration. Other reponses included the need for more parent/teacher and student/teacher communication, safer procedures, more discipline, a shorter distance between home and school, additional school employees, and more activities, both extracurricular, and those for students and parents.

In response to question 14, concerning what would cause parent's to be more actively involved

in the school. 67% of the answers dealt with scheduling different times that they could be involved. 64% of the answers had to do with having more time to be involved. 19% of the answers felt more communication between parents and teachers would involve them and 15% felt more information about school events would involve them. Other responses were more activities, including extracurricular, student and parent activities, help with transportation, a shorter distance to the school, and help with child care.

Discussion

It was interesting to note that the number of parents who replied that they were contacted on an average of once a month was equal to those that replied that they were contacted once a year or less. Apparently some parents were contacted often while others were rarely contacted. This should be kept in mind when communicating with parents and an effort to communicate with all parents should be made. It was reassuring, however, that most of the parents felt well

informed about their child's progress and comfortable with the school and its' employees.

The fact that the most common type of communication was a note on report cards was perhaps evidence that teachers do not communicate on a regular and personal basis with parents. The fact that newsletters, however, appear to be a popular form of communication was proof of the success of the newsletters. Nelson county, Ryan Primary and some individual teachers send out newsletters. Although newsletters do little to communicate about individual student progress they do inform about school activities. It appeared that some form of newsletter did reach a good number of parents, since most felt that the newsletter was a typical mode of communication.

It was evident that parents do not visit the school or attend school functions very often and that most were rarely asked to work on school committees. A closer examination of the reasons for a lack of parent attendence is necessary. It is also important to look into why only a few parents were asked to participate. School

personnel should make an effort to ask more of a variety of parents to be involved in the hopes of increasing involvement.

Almost all parents expressed a desire for more parent/teacher communication when they were asked what changes in communication that they would like to see. They wanted to be more aware of student progress especially if there was a problem. A few responses expressed a concern that they did not know if their child was having a problem until the report cards were issued. Parents also wanted more parent/teacher conferences, more personalized teacher notes and contact and more information about class activities. One parent expressed a desire for teachers to "realize I have an interest and do know something about my child." It was evident that parents want to know more about what and how well their child does in school.

When asked what could be done to improve the school many of the responses required a need for more money and better equipment. They included a desire for better facilities, more teacher aides,

a full time nurse, a lunch moniter, a smaller teacher/student ratio, a computer and art room, higher teacher salaries, safer playground equipment and more books and supplies.

There was also a number of responses that concerned changes in the curriculum and different subject concentrations. Some parents wanted regular art and music classes while others wanted more concentration on environmental issues and moral values.

Other responses expressed again a concern for more communication including better communication between students and teachers. They wanted more individualized attention, more one on one tutoring and for teachers to listen to the students more. Other responses expressed a desire to have parent/teacher communication, specifically communication about student progress, occur more often. Suggestions included biweekly and monthly updates.

There were a variety of reasons given as to why parents were not more involved. It was obvious that most of the reasons were the result

of a lack of time and work. Perhaps rescheduling activities and alternating the time of activities would involve more people. One also must keep in mind that some parents must drive about an hour to get to Ryan. They expressed a concern because by the time they got back home it was way past their child's bedtime. Some parents specifically asked for events to be scheduled either later in the evening or on Friday and Saturday. Many parents felt a lack of time to volunteer because of their work schedule. One parent who worked replied, "make us more aware of what we might be able to do on a smaller scale, ie, if we can't commit to volunteering all year, what about a monthly deal." She suggested having a room mother for every month or a teacher's helper for reading on a weekly basis.

Other responses were that they were not asked to participate. They replied that they were not involved because they were not contacted to be involved. One parent replied, "Ask and ye shall receive." A lack of involvement was also attributed to a lack of transportation and child

care for activities. In addition, many requested that the fund raisers be held for something specific. Others would rather donate money than participate in a fund raiser.

When interpreting the data it was important to remember that it may not be truly representative of the feelings of all Ryan Primary parents. Not all surveys were returned thus eliminating those parents from the study. In addition, questions 12 through 14 required written responses and many were left blank. Therefore, it was possible that the parents who answered these questions had real concerns about the question that was asked. In addition, they may have had extra time because of the time that it took to answer hese questions. As a result, parents who had a number of outside commitments may have skipped these questions. Finally, since to answer these questions the ability to write was required they would have prohibited persons who could not do this from responding. This could very well be a factor considering that Ryan is located in a very rural area. Along those lines, parents who

were not able to read would not be able to complete the survey at all and these were the parents that have a very unique need for communication from the school.

Recommendations

It appears that there was a need for more communication between the school and the parents. Although many parents felt well informed and were pleased with the efforts of the school, there were some parents who felt a lack of communication. Ryan may want to strive to communicate equally with all of the parents and alter some activities so that more parents are included. It may be important for teachers to strive to communicate and ask every parent to participate even though they believe that the parent is unable to help. By asking every parent to be involved Ryan may increase parent involvement and include some new parents in school activities.

It also appeared that many parents want to be more aware of their child's progress. A desire for some type of communication between report

cards was present in many parents. Richardson (1988) recommended a mid-term telephone conference. At the beginning of the year parents would request either to be called, at home or at work, or to call the teacher themselves. The parent at this time would be informed about student progress, specifically something positive, and made aware of an area that needed extra parent encouragement or assistance. The teacher would document the telephone conference for administrative purposes. Teachers may send notes to parents as follow up to the conference.

Since a number of parents wanted more personal communication from teachers, teachers may wish to inform parents about student progress through a hand written note or a phone call. Morrison (1978) recommended that teachers could have their students write notes to their parents. These notes could be about school progress or used as a discipline technique. For instance, if a child was first warned about misbehavior the next step would be having the child write a letter to his parents about his behavior.

Involvement could be increased by paying special consideration to what prohibits parent involvement. When scheduling events it would be important to keep in mind that some parents lack transportation. Establishing car pools could alleviate this problem. This could also help parents who live far away from the school. If they had someone to ride with they may be more willing to come.

Another problem for some parents was the lack of child care. Providing free child care at the school during the activity, could also help involve more parents.

A suggestion that was made by a number of parents should also be considered. Perhaps activities could be scheduled on fridays and saturdays. It is unfair, though, to burden teachers with another day at school so maybe weekend events could be coincided with giving teachers another school day off.

Another consideration would be to have attendance incentives at parent meetings (US Congress, 1989). Previous research has found

that special meetings are apt to increase parent attendance. Meetings could also coincide with family nights, potluck dinnners, carnivals, or cultural dinners (Morrison, 1988). In addition, these events can increase the feeling that the school is a nonthreatening and can be a social place.

The New Jersey State Department of Education (1989) recommended personal contact to solicit parent support. They stress the need to maintain contact with parents who are unable to attend school activities. In addition, teachers may want to set a goal of calling two parents a week to maintain contact.

Teachers may also want to consider having parent involvement on a smaller scale. This could be especially beneficial in including working parents. It may be conclevable that working parents could arrange a small amount of time off every few months to help in the class.

Another program that may increase involvement would be to have an open classroom visitation policy. It would allow parents to visit the class

whenever they were able to (Morrison, 1984). If this is unacceptable to teachers or school structure, perhaps having parent visits on a particular day is possible.

Another way to involve parents would be to increase school pride. For instance, Warren County Schools in Tennessee participated in "Project Pride" (Coe and Simms, 1989). Each month there was a sponser of an activity to promote school pride. They submitted information about the activity to the superintendent who sent the information to the newspapers. Activities included participation in contests and improving school grounds. They promoted school spirit and parent involvement and often involve local businesses.

In establishing parent involvement programs it would be important to recognize parents for their efforts. Set up some sort of way in which to honor parents for involvement. Rich (1987), also, recommended featuring a "Family of the Week." This family could be displayed on a bulletin board. It may be possible that honoring

parents and families in your class would increase parent involvement.

Further study in increasing parent involvement at Ryan would focus on implementing activities based on these recommendations and analizing their results.

Evaluation

It was apparent that many parents want to be more informed about student progress. Therefore, an activity was attempted in two classrooms in the hope that it would make parents more aware of their child's progress. At the same time, the activity was not very time consuming on the part of the teachers.

Subjects

Two teachers from Ryan Primary issued "Happy Grams" (see appendix B) to their students. One class was a kindergarten class and the other was a third grade class. The kindergarten class had an enrollment of 18 students. The third grade class had an enrollment of 25 students.

Apparatus

The "Happy Gram Survey" (see Appendix C) was issued to all of the parents of students in the participating kindergarten class and third grade class. In the kindergarten class 9 surveys were returned. In the third grade class 21 surveys were returned, although 2 of these were not completed.

Procedure

The teachers issued two "Happy Grams" a day for a period of two weeks. The were instructed to issue them for anything that they wanted.

At the end of the marking period the survey's went home with the report cards. The surveys were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed.

Results

The kindergarten parents who responded all wanted to see the "Happy Gram" program continue and felt more informed about their child's progress as a result (see Table 7).

Table 7

Kindergarten Parent's Reponse to Survey Questions

Question	Yes	No
Parents (n=9)		
1	8(89%)	1
2	9	0
3	9	0

In the kindergarten class most, or 70%, of the "Happy Grams" were given for specific behaviors. 50% of the comments to question 2 remarked on how "Happy Grams" helped build self esteem. Other comments included awareness of student behavior and information about school activities. In addition, three comments concerned the "Happy Grams" creating a better impression of the teacher.

The majority of third grade parents felt more informed about their child's progress and wanted to see the "Happy Grams" continued (see Table 8).

Table 8

Third Grade Parent's Response to Survey Questions

Question	Yes	No
Parents (n=21)		
1	12(60%)	8
2	10(77%)	8
3	7(54%)	6

In the third grade class all of the "Happy Grams" were given for general reasons. 57% of the comments concerned an improvement of student self esteem. Other comments concluded that "Happy Grams" were a useful way for students to self monitor their own behavior.

Discussion

The "Happy Grams" did make parents more aware of their child's progress. There was a more positive feeling about this in the kindergarten though and reasons for this might be further explored. It is possible that maybe giving the "Grams" for specific behaviors only would inform parents about progress to a larger extent.

When interpreting the data it was important to remember that not every survey was returned. In addition, not every student had recieved a "Happy Gram." In the kindergarten class the teacher had issued a "Happy Gram" to everyone. There was the possibility that the parents did not remember what the "Happy Gram" was or that it did not get all the way home.

The unexpected results of this activity were the number of responses that claimed that the "Happy Gram" improved self esteem. In continuing this activity teachers might focus on giving "Happy Grams" for very specific behaviors and attempting to give one to every student for some reason.

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Appendix A

Community Survey

1. How often does your child's teacher, guidance counselor, or principal communicate with you by phone or mail? (Please mark your response.)

   [ ] Once a month or more *[ ] 4 or 5 times a year* *[ ] Twice a year* *[ ] Once a year or less*

2. In general, how well does the school keep you informed of your child's progress in school?

   [ ] Very well *[ ] Fairly well* *[ ] About average* *[ ] Not at all well*

3. How does the school communicate with you? Please put the letter of the best response in the block for the first, second, and third most frequent forms of communication. (Put the appropriate letter in each box.)

   A. *Newsletter* B. *Telephone call* C. *Personal visit* D. *Home visit* E. *Note on report car*

Most often way	*Second way*	*Third way*

4. How do feel about this statement? "I feel welcome by the school to come and visit my child's class."

   [ ] Strongly agree *[ ] Mildly agree* *[ ] Mildly disagree* *[ ] Strongly disagree*

5. How do you feel about this statement? "When I have a question or concern about my child, I feel comfortable in calling his or her teacher for an answer."

   [ ] Strongly agree *[ ] Mildly agree* *[ ] Mildly disagree* *[ ] Strongly disagree*

6. How do you feel about this statement? "When I have a question or concern about my child, I feel comfortable in calling his or her principal for an answer."

   [ ] Strongly agree *[ ] Mildly agree* *[ ] Mildly disagree* *[ ] Strongly disagree*

7. How often did you attend school functions or visit the school in the past year?

   [ ] About once a week *[ ] About once a month* *[ ] A few times* *[ ] Not at all*

8. Have you been invited to serve on school committees working together with teachers and students?

   [ ] Too many times *[ ] Many times* *[ ] A few times* *[ ] Not at all*

- **Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, and F to describe the quality of their work. Suppose your child's school was graded in the same way.**

9. What grade would you give the school for its performance in educating your child. (Please circle one)

   A *B* *C* *D* *F*

10. What grade would you give the school for helping your child enjoy learning?

   A *B* *C* *D* *F*

11. What grade would you give the school for communicating with your child?

   A *B* *C* *D* *F*

Please take the time to answer the following three questions. Any suggestions you give us will help us make your child's school the best it can be.

12. What changes, if any, do you think the school's principal and teachers should make in the way they communicate with you?

13. What should be done in order to improve the school.

14. What might cause you to be more actively involved in activities at the school?

Appendix B

Happy Gram

```
**********************************************************************
* HAPPY GRAM !!!!                                                    *
*                                                                    *
* TO: _____________________    Date: _____________________           *
* FROM:_____________________                                         *
*                                                                    *
*  ____________ had a SUPER day!!! _____________________________     *
*  ____________________________________________________________      *
*  ____________________________________________________________      *
*  ____________________________________________________________      *
*                                                                    *
**********************************************************************
```

Appendix C:

Happy Gram Survey

Dear Parents,

Please take the time to complete this survey and return it with your student's report card. Thanks for your time and effort.

1. Did your child receive a "Happy Gram?" yes_____no____
   If so, why? What did your child do to receive a "Happy Gram?"

2. Would you like to see this teacher continue to issue "Happy Grams?" yes____no____
   Why or why not?

3. Did the "Happy Gram" make you more aware of your child's progress? yes____no____

*** other comments: